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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes a unit of study or program called "Africa Revisited," which gives students an opportunity to read African folktales and take part in making them come alive through sociodramatics, improvisations, puppetry, and creative writing. The paper's five main sections are as follows: (1) Project Overview; (2) Project Goals; (3) Project Activities; (4) Outside Resources; and (5) Suggested Books (a list of 15 resources). (SR)

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AFRICA REVISITED

I. Project Overview

Africa Revisited introduces the rhythm and cadence found in African storytelling. The virtues of humility, kindness, patience, sympathy and courage that are displayed in African stories help African-American students relate to their lost heritage, culture and tradition and perhaps provide an understanding of the essential story patterns and/or motifs which make them so unique. Africa Revisited grants students an opportunity to read African folktales and take part in making them come alive through sociodramatics, improvisations, puppetry and creative writing.

African folktales, passed down through generations of children, include references to the customs, traditions, beliefs and ways of the African people that enrich the lives of school-age children living in a multi-cultural society. This unit of study not only offers the opportunity to be entertained by a good folktale, but provides a medium through which the children will become contemporary storytellers for other children similar to the oral traditions practiced by their African ancestors.

Exposing African-American children to the philosophical, sociological and historical foundations of African literature, traditions and customs helps them develop an awareness and an appreciation of the achievements of their ancestors. This plan helps children develop better self-images through knowledge of their rich heritage. The pride and joy experienced from knowledge of oneself could only serve to promote racial harmony and discourage racial intolerance.

II. Project Goals

1. To understand and experience the oral tradition of storytelling and encourage students to preserve and pass on their own history and culture, as Africans have been doing for thousands of years.
2. To expose the students to the common motifs often used in a folktale and compare and contrast them with fables, fairytales and other stories read by children.
3. To develop skills in speaking/expression and creative writing.
4. To learn common words in Swahili including number words for performing basic algorithms.
5. To analyze and apply the values and morals depicted in African literature.
6. To enrich writing and/or oral expression through creating contemporary folktales.
7. To enhance comprehension and expression using puppetry, sociodramatics and other creative mediums to make the folktales come alive.

III. Project Activities

A. Reading African Folktales

*Have children sit in a circle. Whisper something in the first ones ear and instruct him/her to pass it on. Discuss how it

changed after the last person reports it back to the class. Explain that there are many ways a story can be told and African storytellers for generations told stories to children and as we read folktales we must remember that the original story changes each time someone else tells it. After reading a folktale, let the children retell it in their own words. For enrichment in the lower grades, let the children act out parts of the story. The upper grades will enjoy forming a storytelling troupe. Urge the children to learn one story (not necessary word for word) and practice telling it to a classmate or other classes. Designate your students official griots of their own families. Ask them to list some oral traditions that are told and retold in their family, such as family stories, Bible stories, spirituals and songs, poems and rhymes, prayers and blessings, proverbs and superstitutions. Let the children choose the special things about their families they want to share with others.

African literature exposes children to African traditions, morals and values. African storytellers (griots) told stories that explained the unexplainables as well as taught rules and codes of behavior to children. The children can brainstorm "unexplainables" before actually reading the folktale. For example, "How did the spider get a thin waist?" "How does a drum sing?" "How did the world get so much wisdom?" "Why doesn't a crab have a head?" etc. Many wonders are opened up to the children. Have the students create stories of their own and explain them. In groups the students can create stories using the Anansi character. These activities will influence the children's innate desire to tell a story, touch upon the oral tradition of storytelling and introduce them to the motifs used in literature.

*Learning common Swahili words will help students develop a more intense vocabulary. Common Swahili words are often used in the stories that the children will read. Below is a list of common Swahili words including numbers from one to ten.

Nyame	Sky God
Osebo	Leopard
Tembo	Elephant
Akykiegie	Turtle
Kinkero	Antelope
Kinyanga	Ostrich
Mmboro	Hornet
Mmoatia	Fairy whom men never see
Jambo	Hello

One	Moja
Two	Mbili
Three	Tatu
Four	Nne
Five	Tano
Six	Sita
Seven	Saba

Eight	Nane
Nine	Tisa
Ten	Kumi

After learning to count in Swahili, the students could perform basic algorithms in Swahili. They could also work together as a group and create a large original Swahili counting book.

The students could also write stories using the Swahili characters, a practice common in African folktales. For example, How did Akykiegie get a hard shell on his back? Who is Nyame? What does Nyame mean to you? The upper grade children can share their stories with the younger grades. With the use of tape recorders, lower grade student stories could come alive right in the classroom.

Creative writing and expression are major elements of Africa Revisited. Children in the lower grades and/or with low writing abilities could use tape recorders to compose stories of their own. The children will also enjoy making character puppets and telling their stories to other people in the community. Nursing homes, day care centers, senior citizen centers and libraries welcome a story and/or puppet show created by the children.

Students in the upper grades or with high writing abilities could write a contemporary folktale that focuses on major issues that concern their community. For example, folktales about drugs and/or other crime related activities will encourage developing good moral values and related skills. This activity will offer a revitalizing first step in the development of a better community.

III. Outside Resources

Medgar Evers College (ARCES) African Resource Center for Elementary School opens September 27, 1991. The purpose of ARCES is to bring parents, teachers and community activists of all ethnic and racial backgrounds the lastest scholarship on Africa and African diaspora, the most recently published books and other educational materials in this area, and ways to translate the recent scholarship in these areas into new curriculum materials and projects appropriate for children. ARCES at MEC will prepare and disseminate information and work with such resources as children's books, films and videos for the inclusion of African studies in elementary school. They present annual lecture/workshop series and summer institutes. Contact Dr. Charlotte Y. Phoenix and/or Dr. Florence Tager (718) 270-6473.

The Shadow Box Theatre and Brooklyn Academy of Music offer yearly African shows. Materials are also given out that will enhance your program.

The Shadow Box Theatre
325 West End Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10023
(212) 724-0677

Brooklyn Academy of Music
30 Lafayette Avenue
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238
(718) 636-4100

The Brooklyn Children's Museum has African art and instruments that will enhance the program.

Brooklyn Children's Museum
145 Brooklyn Avenue
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11214
(718) 735-4400

The African Arts Museum has a collection of art, instruments and a slide presentation on Africa as it is today. The exhibit and presentation are very informative and will enhance your program.

Simmons Collection African Arts Museum
1063 Fulton Street
Brooklyn, New York
(718) 230-0933

IV. Suggested Books

Clarke, Mollie **Congo Boy**, Scholastic Inc.
McDermott, George **Anansi The Spider**, Scholastic Inc.
Arkhurst, Joyce Cooper **The Adventures of Spider**, Scholastic
Arkhurst, Joyce Cooper **More Adventures of Spider** Scholastic
Aardema, Verna **Bimwili & The Zimwi**, Dial Books for Young Readers, N.Y.
Haley, Gail **A Story - A Story**, Atheneum - Macmillan Publishing Co. N.Y.
Brian, Ashley **Turtle Knows Your Name**, Atheneum - Macmillan Publishing Inc. N.Y.
Robbins, Sandra **How the Turtle Got Its Shell**, Berrent Publications Inc. N.Y.
See-More's Workshop - Exclusively for the Shadow Box Theatre - Inc.
Ekeh, Chief Dr. General Professor Efranim **How Tables Came to Umu Madu**, AWP Young Readers Series
Hamilton, Virginia **The People Could Fly**, American Black Folktales - Book and Cassette Available.
Feelings, Muriel **Moja Means One**,
Feelings, Muriel **Jambo Means Hello**
Feelings, Muriel **Zamani Goes to Market.**
Aardema, Verna **Why Mosquitoes Buzz in Peoples Ears.**